

eastern sea board of India and vast numbers congregate here on the mudflats during the winters.

While carrying out bird migration studies at Pulicat during 1990 several species of waders were banded to study their movement patterns. Two species were ringed which are interesting in terms of their distribution and occurrence, as they are new records for Andhra Pradesh.

Rednecked phalarope *Phalaropus lobatus* (Linn.): Seven birds were ringed (Ring nos. A-232535 to A-232541) at Atkanithippa in Pulicat Bird Sanctuary on 21 September 1990. According to the HANDBOOK OF BIRDS OF INDIA AND PAKISTAN (Ali, S. and Ripley, S.D. 1987) the rednecked phalarope is mainly a winter visitor to the coasts

of India and is seen mainly on the western seaboard. On the eastern coast there are very scanty records of this species, usually seen off the coast. As the birds were seen in the mudflats of the Sanctuary they were probably on passage.

Eastern knot *Calidris tenuirostris* (Horsfield): One was ringed on 19 September 1990 (Ring no. B-57777) at Atkanithippa. There are isolated records of the eastern knot on the eastern coastline, but its occurrence at Pulicat is a new record for Andhra Pradesh.

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November 30, 1990

13. CONFIRMATION OF THE BREEDING OF THE COMMON TERN *STERNA HIRUNDO* LINN. IN SRI LANKA

Reference is made to my paper on the breeding of the common tern *Sterna hirundo* in Sri Lanka (Hoffmann 1990, *JBNHS* 87 (1): 68-72). In that paper I reported in detail on a breeding colony of the common tern, which I discovered in 1980 on a small island of coral debris (called Irrachchal), off the east coast of Sri Lanka. It is the first and so far only case of breeding of this tern anywhere in the Oriental region. Although there were strong indications (presence of many adult birds in breeding plumage) that breeding also took place in subsequent years, actual proof was lacking. For a number of reasons, but chiefly because of the ongoing ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka, I was unable to visit the island at the right time for a number of years.

But at the end of May 1990 I did pay another visit to the island. I had seen common terns in breeding plumage in the area as early as end March and, therefore, confidently expected to find evidence of breeding.

In 1980 I discovered the first five nest scrapes with eggs of the common tern at the end of May. By the end of June there were 41 nests with intact eggs, seven with broken eggs, two with downy chicks and about 12 abandoned nests, indicating a colony strength of over 60 breeding pairs of common terns. Thus egg laying started at the end of May, reached its peak by about the middle of June, and was completed by early July.

Large crested terns *Sterna bergii velox* regularly use this island for breeding; sporadic egg laying may take place during June, but reaches its

peak during the second half of July.

By mid-July (when the breeding of common terns is almost completed) roseate terns *Sterna dougallii* and little terns *Sterna albifrons* may also breed on the island. The breeding seasons for the various species may vary somewhat in different years, in response to weather, feeding and possibly other conditions. I visited the island on 23 May 1990, at mid-morning. There were about 20 large crested, 8 roseate and 10 common terns perching on the coral pieces, all in unmistakable breeding plumage. The common terns stood out by their bright red bills with black tips, glossy black caps, bright orange legs and feet, dark edge on end of upper wing (in flight), and sleek silvery-grey and white plumage. All birds took to the air when I approached the island and when I landed. The large crested and roseate soon disappeared and only the common remained, variously circling in the air (with loud, high pitched cries of *twink*) and settling down at the highest point of the coral debris. The birds took off and settled nervously even when I was only 5 m away from where they had perched. When I got closer, some would dive at me with a harsh and angry *kaaarr*. This continued throughout the period I was on the island.

I found five eggs in typical nest scrapes, marked and lined with small pebbles, shells and some feathers (as in 1980). The nests were widely spaced and close to or between large pieces of coral (some standing upright, thus providing shelter and shade, and perhaps protection against crushing

by large numbers of other terns roosting on the island at night). I also found three broken eggs, the deep orange yolk smeared on the coral pieces. There also were some empty nest scrapes, presumably in preparation of laying. The five intact eggs, one in each nest, were of the usual kind, heavily blotched and streaked, and of the following dimensions: 41x28 mm (two eggs), 43x29 mm, 40x28 mm, 41x29 mm.

The rather unrepresentative number of eggs gives an average of 41.2 x 28.4 mm, similar to the 1980 average (41.2x28.5 mm) and again smaller in width than the averages given in the literature (31.5 mm).

There were no nests or eggs of large crested or other terns. When I moved away from the nests and crouched at the edge of the island, the common terns immediately settled in the nesting area, and five birds sat on the five nests with one egg each. The others perched nearby on coral debris. In the evenings large numbers of terns use the island for roosting, as observed through the telescope from the shore.

It was my intention to visit the island again in mid-June, when I expected to find up to a 100 nests of common terns. Unfortunately the ethnic conflict broke out once again, involving the area directly in warlike operations, and I was prevented from carrying out my plan. Nevertheless, I am now satisfied that the common tern is a resident breeding bird in Sri Lanka.

The time of the year, size of eggs, type of nest scrapes, and identity of the breeding birds are the same as in 1980, and there is no doubt in my mind that the common tern would have bred on this island in the interim and will continue to do so every year if not disturbed. There is more than ample evidence of the all-year round presence on the east coast of Sri Lanka of common terns,

including many adults in breeding plumage.

Two questions remain: First, are there other breeding colonies of the common tern in Sri Lanka? Although I was sure that this would be the case, a preliminary recce along the eastern coast from Valaichchenai to Foul Point did not reveal any other breeding colonies at the end of May 1990. Several rocky islands (some with vegetation, sand and coral debris) were visited, but no evidence of the breeding of terns could be found.

Obviously these potential breeding places should have been inspected again by the end of June/beginning of July, but events prevented this. Irrachchal is the only island of its kind known to me along the coasts of Sri Lanka, and until there is evidence to the contrary, I must now assume that it is the only place on which common terns regularly breed in Sri Lanka.

It is thus a unique location, with a unique tern population, and should be given fullest protection under the law as a conservation area to which access by humans would be prohibited at least during the egg-laying period, say from beginning of May to the end of August each year.

The second question revolves around the subspecies of the breeding common terns. I continue to think that it is more likely to be *S.h. hirundo* rather than *S.h. tibetana*. There is some visual support for this assumption, because all the birds seen have a pale silvery-grey mantle. In HANDBOOK OF THE BIRDS OF INDIA AND PAKISTAN (Ali, S. and Ripley, S.D. 1969), *S.h. tibetana* in breeding plumage is said to be "darker and slightly browner above, darker below" than *S.h. hirundo*. Obviously a specimen will have to be collected, but I could not bring myself to shooting one of these birds over the nest.

July 6, 1990

THILO HOFFMANN

14. INDIAN SKIMMER *RYNCHOPS ALBICOLLIS* SWAINSON AND BLACK STORK *CICONIA NIGRA* (LINN.) – NEW ADDITIONS TO THE AVIFAUNA OF KEOLADEO NATIONAL PARK, BHARATPUR

Altogether 317 species of birds were recorded from Keoladeo National Park, Bharatpur, from 1980 to 1986 (Vijayan 1987). Subsequently in 1988 two more species – the Indian skimmer *Rynchops albicollis* and black stork *Ciconia nigra* were added to the list.

On 4 February 1988 a small flock of six Indian

skimmers was seen feeding in one of the aquatic blocks of Keoladeo National Park. The birds were seen only for two days. The Indian skimmer has been recorded as a rare vagrant in inland tanks (Ali and Ripley 1983). The black stork was sighted on 3 April 1988 in the Park and could be seen only for four days. This stork is a winter visitor